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Basic Horse Bandages

In your role as manager of a yard or even as a horse owner, you may be required to bandage a horse's leg. In the event of a vet not being able to get to you immediately, it's important to know the basics while waiting for the vet to arrive. It is also useful to know how to re-apply a bandage after a vet visit. Bandages are mostly for protection. A bandage has to be sufficient in its purpose - a neat or good looking bandage may not necessarily provide the right function.

There are 2 important types of bandages.

These are:

- Wound bandages
- Support bandages

Wound Bandages

The main function of a wound bandage is to protect the wound. There are various types of wounds and a lot of different materials may be used to cover them. As long as the material is clean (if possible sterile) it can be used in an emergency. It is important to note that it must not "stick" (adhere) to the wound. Disinfect the wound with clean water and a disinfectant eg: Hibitane. Hibitane can be obtained from any veterinary practice. Should a disinfectant not be available then clean running water will suffice.

There are 4 layers in a wound bandage:

Layer 1 – Wound dressing

There are a lot of different types of wound dressings and the type of wound will determine the type of dressing used. Never apply cotton wool directly to an open wound. It will stick to the wound and when you remove it, you may remove all the healthy healing tissue. Cotton wool also tends to remain behind in the wound.

Gauze can be used on most wounds and is easily obtained in different shapes and sizes from most pharmacies. It is recommended to apply a cream to prevent the gauze from sticking directly to the wound. The cream should be water-based and not oil-based (eg: Vaseline). A great example of a water based cream is Silbecor (active ingredient- silver sulphadiazine) or Podine Ointment (active ingredient- iodine). If the wound is dirty and/or infected then Acriflavine Glycerine may be used. Please bear in mind though that it can blister the legs.

Layer 2 – Cotton wool/ Gamgee

Once the wound is covered the next layer would consist of Gamgee or Cotton wool. Apply generous amounts of cotton wool as this will prevent pressure sores. Start above the wound spiralling downwards and then if possible back up again.

Layer 3 - Crepe

Crepe will be your next layer and when applying, use uniform pressure. Each layer should overlap the previous layer at least 50%. When tying off the crepe, do so at the side of the leg as tying at the front or back can cause damage to the tendons or other important structures.

Layer 4 - Elastoplast

The final layer will consist of Elastoplast. This layer is to add protection and not to be used to stabilise the bandage. Apply one layer relatively loosely and these should overlap each other by 30%. Cover the top and the bottom of the bandage to prevent any dirt getting to the wound site.

Tip: It does help if all the layers are applied in the same direction.

Support Bandages

Support bandages can make an impact to a horses' level of pain. These bandages are

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Pressure Points

Heel:

- Bulbs of the heel – Do not apply too tight over the heels.

Knee:

- On the inside of the knee where you can see a "pointy" bone like structure.
- On the back of the knee- the "pointy" bone like structure.

Hock:

- The tendons go up from the point of the hock.

Call your Vet or Replace the Bandage if:

- A bandage gets wet.
- There is a foul odour.
- The bandage has

used on horses that are extremely lame and unable to put weight on the injured leg. Remember though that the other leg is now bearing all the weight, and will thus require support.

Thus there are 2 types:

- The simple support bandage – used on the opposite leg for support
- Robert Jones bandage – supports and stabilises the injured leg.

Simple support bandage

The simple support bandage is very similar to the Robert Jones bandage except you do not apply the second layer of cotton wool and crepe.

It is however important to note that **all** layers are applied down to the ground.

Bandages Relating to Certain Anatomical Areas:

Foot bandage

The foot bandage may seem fairly complicated but once you have done it a few times, it becomes simple to apply. Acriflavine glycerine is good to use. It has an osmotic effect which may help with bruises and abscesses. As a first layer there are a few options; cotton wool/ gamgee and/or nappies.

Nappies are fantastic to use as they are easy to apply and the sticky tapes keep it in place. They don't wear through as easily as cotton wool for example. If you require additional padding a second nappy or a layer of cotton wool may be applied. The second layer will be the crepe bandage. Wrap the crepe around the hoof to cover all areas of the nappy. Be sure not to apply too much pressure to the bulbs of the heels. Elastoplast or duct tape can be your third layer. The Elastoplast wraps around the hoof to cover the crepe. Apply a loose layer of it around the top of the bandage to prevent dirt or shavings from getting in- this is optional. Duct tape makes for a very good third layer. Stick 5/6 strips of duct tape approximately 30cm in length to each other, overlapping +-50% to make a square. Then stick a second layer of 5/6 strips on top of the first layer in the opposite direction. Stick it to the bottom of the hoof and secure it with more duct tape. Duct tape is tough, hardy and generally lasts longer than Elastoplast.

Pressure points:

Bulbs of the heel – Do not apply too tight over the heels



Distal limb bandages

This bandage is applied to the lower part of the leg from the knee/ hock. It is important to note that the bandage should be applied all the way to the ground to prevent swelling distally. A bandage applied too tightly or with too little cotton wool will cause serious damage to the tendons.

When bandaging the fetlock, the bandage does not have to go all the way to the ground. It is however very important to apply enough pressure so the bandage won't slip down the leg and cause undue pressure.

Knee and hock bandage

These bandages are difficult to apply, and slip easily. The knees and hocks do have pressure points; proper and enough padding is vital! A "figure of 8" bandage works best as it does not put unnecessary pressure on the pressure points with the cross over area at the front. It is a good idea to do this under veterinary supervision- if possible. If need be, a lower limb bandage may be applied to keep the knee or hock bandage in place.

Pressure points on the knee:

- On the inside of the knee where you can see a "pointy" bone like structure
- On the back of the knee- the "pointy" bone like structure

Pressure points on the hock:

- The tendons go up from the point of the hock.

To prevent pressure, it's a good idea to use 2 rolls of crepe or rolled up cotton wool. Put these on the inside and outside of the tendon to fill up the area. Apply the bandage while keeping these in place with either sticky tape or if you have an extra pair of hands available to hold them in place.

Robert Jones Bandage – this should be done by a vet or under vet supervision if possible

Remember one word: **LAYERS**

A Robert Jones bandage is basically made up of a primary layer which is then repeated. The primary layer includes 2 layers of cotton wool and 2 layers of Crepe. This is then repeated but with a layer of Elastoplast on top.

If there is no open wound, go straight to applying the cotton wool. Unroll the cotton wool and start from above the injured area spiralling all the way down to the ground. Apply at least 2 layers that overlap each other.

The first layer of crepe is to keep the cotton wool in place and define the shape of the bandage. The second layer is to apply pressure evenly over the whole bandage.

Most owners do not apply enough pressure.

A third crepe can also be applied depending on the length of the bandage.

Remember: Approximately 1cm of cotton wool should always be visible at the top and bottom of the bandage after the crepe is applied.

Unroll the Elastoplast prior to applying it as you can then apply even pressure. Make sure to start from the top of the bandage, above the layer of cotton wool (to prevent

slipped.

- The leg swells above or below the bandage.
- The horse shows discomfort.
- If discharge is visible.

any dirt from getting in) and spiral down the leg to the ground, lastly applying a loop around the heels of the hoof.